

## Message Text

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AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

S E C R E T ROME 2745

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PFOR, US, MT

SUBJ: MALTA: AN ITALIAN ECHO

REF: VALLETTA 0141

1. IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO RECEIPT VALLETTA'S EXCELLENT AND THOUGHTFUL POLICY ASSESSMENT, EMBOFF DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH WITH AN MFA WORKING LEVEL SOURCE THE ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE OF THE FUTURE OF RELATIONS WITH MALTA.

2. ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IS CURRENTLY STUDYING THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO ITALY IN MAINTAINING A WESTERN TIE WITH MALTA AS THE BRITISH PRESENCE ON THE ISLAND PHASES OUT. "A LOT OF PAPERS ARE CIRCULATING ON THIS SUBJECT." THE OPTIONS BEING PRESENTED TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL AND TO THE MINISTER HAVE BY NOW BEEN REDUCED TO FOUR:

A. THE NATO SOLUTION, WHICH WOULD INVOLVE A CONTINUATION OF (AND LIKELY AN INCREASE IN) THE NATO SUBSIDY WITH THE MINIMUM EXPECTATION OF DENYING SOVIET ("AND OTHER UNFRIENDLY") ACCESS TO THE ISLAND BUT WOULD NOT LIKELY GIVE THE ALLIANCE ANY DIRECT SECURITY BENEFIT (THE BRITISH ASW ROLE NOW PERFORMED FROM MALTA WOULD HAVE TO "BE TAKEN OVER BY SOMEONE ELSE SOMEWHERE ELSE");

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B. THE FRENCH SOLUTION. A FRENCH PRESENCE OF SOME SORT ON MALTA WOULD PROBABLY BE MORE ACCEPTABLE TO MINTOFF THAN ANY OTHER FROM EUROPE. THE FRENCH HAVE INCREASED THEIR INTEREST AND PRESENCE (PARTICULARLY NAVAL) IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND MIGHT LOOK WITH SOME FAVOR UPON THE NOTION OF A SPECIAL LINK WITH MALTA -- AND FOOT THE BILL. ON PERMUTATION OF THIS OPTION WOULD INCLUDE THE ITALIANS WITH THE FRENCH IN THE NEW MALTESE CONDOMINIUM.

C. THE BILATERAL SOLUTION. IN THIS CASE ITALY WOULD, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, REPLACE THE BRITISH AS MALTA'S LINK TO THE WEST GENERALLY AND NATO PARTICULARLY. THERE SEEMS TO BE CONSIDERABLE DOUBT WITHIN THE MFAAS TO THE VIABILITY OF THIS COURSE OF ACTION: ITALY CANNOT REPLACE THE CONTRIBUTION THE BRITISH HAVE HERETOFORE MADE TO THE MALTESE EXCHEQUER. IT IS NOT LIKELY THAT MINTOFF WOULD BE ANY MORE INTERESTED IN A SEMI-EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH ITALY THAN WITH ANY OTHER MAJOR WESTERN OR EASTERN COMMITTED COUNTRY THAT WOULD REDUCE HIS CREDIBILITY AS A THIRD-WORLD FACTOR.

D. THE QUADRIPARTITE SOLUTION. "SHEER MADNESS", OUR SOURCE CALLS IT, BUT A COURSE THE MFA HAS TO CONSIDER BECAUSE IT APPEARS TO BE THAT FAVORED BY MINTOFF. THIS DIRECTION HAS MALTA ASSOCIATING ITSELF IN SOME MORE STRUCTURED WAY WITH ITALY, LIBYA AND TUNISIA. ITALY IS THE CHANNEL TO THE WEST, PROVIDES THE HARDWARE AND EXPERTISE OF MALTESE SECURITY; LIBYA IS THE GATEWAY TO THE "UNCOMMITTED" AND THE SOURCE OF FUNDS; THE INCLUSION OF TUNISIA CONFONDS THE ITALIANS WHO SURMISE THAT EITHER TUNISIA IS SEEN BY MINTOFF AS SOME SORT OF BALANCE TO THE EXCESSES OF QHADDAFI, OR ITS INCLUSION IS PART OF SOME SINISTER PLAN HATCHING IN TRIPOLI.

3. OUR SOURCE STRESSED THAT THE LATTER SOLUTION IS THAT PREFERRED BY MINTOFF. MINTOFF'S PRESISTENCE IN SEEKING A DIALOGUE WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER (AND HE HAS APPARENTLY ENLISTED THE ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AS AN INTERMEDIARY IN SEEKING A MEETING) IS RELATED TO HIS DESIRE TO GET U.S. SUPPORT FOR THIS PLAN.

4. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR TO MALTA IS EXTREMELY ACTIVE ON  
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THE ISLAND, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCE, AND IS CONVINCED (AS ARE MOST OF THOSE IN THE UPPER LEVELS OF THE MFA) OF THE VITAL NATURE OF A CONTINUED NATO/WESTERN FOOTHOLD IN MALTA. THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR HAS REPORTED HIS VIEW THAT MINTOFF AND THE LABOR PARTY WILL WIN HANDILY IN THE 1976 ELECTIONS. THE MFA IS NOT ENTIRELY PERSUADED BUT THE SECRETARY GENERAL, WHO HAS A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MINTOFF, APPARENTLY EXPECTS A LABOR VICTORY BY A SMALL MARGIN. WITH SOME HYPERBOLE, OUR SOURCE

SAID MINTOFF CALLS THE SECRETARY GENERAL BY TELEPHONE "EVERY DAY," AND AS A RESULT MALTA GETS MORE ATTENTION AT THE MFA THAN ANYONE REALIZES.

5. THIS HIGH LEVEL OF ATTENTION IS SOMEWHAT WORRISOME TO US, AND WE WOULD HOPE THAT GREATER CIRCUMSPECTION CAN BE INJECTED INTO ITALIAN CONSIDERATIONS OF THE FUTURE OF THE ISLAND. WE CERTAINLY AGREE WITH VALLETTA THAT IT WOULD BE HIGHLY DESIRABLE TO POSTPONE ANY INITIATIVES FROM NATO (OR FROM ITALY) UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS. WE AGREE TOO THAT A FULL REVIEW OF FUTURE POLICY TOWARD MALTA SHOULD BE HELD WITHIN THE ALLIANCE WITH SOME URGENCY. WE WOULD HOPE THAT SUCH A REVIEW WOULD FORCE THE GOI INTO CLOSER CONSULTATIONS IN NATO ON THE MALTA ISSUE AND PERHAPS PREVENT THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMBITIOUS UNILATERAL ITALIAN POSITIONS THAT WOULD LATER BE DIFFICULT TO SHAKE.

6. IN THE MEANWHILE, AND WHILE THE MFA IS CONSIDERING POLICY OPTIONS, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR THIS EMBASSY, WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S CONCURRENCE, TO HAVE A DISCUSSION AT THE POLICY LEVEL OF THE MFA, DRAWING ON THE RICH LORE PROVIDED IN VALLETTA'S ASSESSMENT. WE WOULD, OF COURSE, NOT REFER TO THE EARLIER DISCUSSION WITH OUR SOURCE BUT WOULD ASK FOR A REVIEW OF CURRENT MFA THINKING ON THE FUTURE OF RELATIONS WITH MALTA AND SEEK TO INSERT THE KINDS OF CAVEATS EXPRESSED IN VALLETTA'S 0141.VOLPE

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